

Leprosy (Hansen Disease)

Agent: *Mycobacterium leprae* (bacteria)

Mode of Transmission: Person-to-person transmission, probably through inhaling respiratory droplets that are released when a person with the disease coughs or sneezes. Transmission can also occur from exposure to nasal secretions from an infected person.

Signs/Symptoms: A chronic disease with varying symptoms, including skin lesions (tuberculoid leprosy); discolored, flat spots on the skin (lepromatous leprosy); numbness on affected areas of the skin; eye problems; nasal congestion; nosebleeds; and nerve damage. If left untreated, the nerve damage can result in paralysis of hands and feet. The bacteria that cause this condition grow very slowly and signs and symptoms may take 2-10 years to appear.

Prevention: Early diagnosis and treatment is important. Hand washing when in contact with patients with lepromatous leprosy and disinfection of surfaces contaminated with infectious nasal secretions should be performed until treatment is established.

Other Important Information: The early diagnosis and proper treatment of this disease can prevent disability and allow the individual to lead an active life. In the past, leprosy was considered highly contagious and devastating. However, it is now known that the disease is hard to spread and is easily treatable once recognized. Education and improved access to treatment are necessary to eliminate the stigma and prejudice still associated with this condition.

One case of leprosy was reported in Virginia during 2016. The case occurred in an adult male who acquired the disease while residing in Pakistan. Since 2000, nine cases of leprosy have been diagnosed in Virginia, with a 5-year average of less than one case per year.